



**Working for a Fire Safe America:
Examining United States Fire Administration
Priorities**

Statement of

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presented to the

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON
TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION**

OF THE

**COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND
TECHNOLOGY**

U.S. House of Representatives

May 17, 2012

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Good morning, Chairman Quayle and Ranking Member Edwards. I am Chief Jim Critchley of the Tucson Fire Department and the President of the Western Fire Chiefs Association (WFCA). The Western Fire Chiefs Association is a division of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC). I thank the committee for the opportunity to discuss the important role that the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) plays in fostering and supporting the leadership of America's fire and emergency medical service (EMS).

The USFA plays a vital role in preparing America's local fire departments for all hazards. It uses training, education, and research to fulfill its mission of reducing civilian and fire service injuries, deaths and property loss from fires and other hazards. Despite its relatively small size, the USFA has a reputation for getting results. For example, the education efforts of the USFA have helped to reduce the number of firefighter deaths each year to less than 100 in the past three years.

One of the most important missions of the U.S. Fire Administration is its educational efforts through the National Fire Academy (NFA). The NFA is the premier fire training academy in the United States, and is influential in shaping the future leaders of America's fire service and EMS. Through online coursework, distance learning, "train-the-trainer" programs, and classes at the NFA's campus in Emmitsburg, Maryland, the NFA trains members of the emergency services in a variety of subjects, including response to terrorist incidents, wildland fires and hazardous materials incidents; arson prevention; and leadership of EMS systems. For example, the NFA plays a large role in educating the fire service about incident command and the adoption of the National Incident Management System. More than half a million students have completed courses at the National Fire Academy from Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 through FY 2011. I am proud to have been one of the 6,145 Arizonans who took NFA classes during that time period.

As part of my department's professional development program, I teach classes to captains and other officers in my department using educational material prepared by the NFA. The NFA provides course material based on national best practices that provide common training and a common frame of reference throughout the fire service. This common training provides interoperability at the incident scene for major disasters, where many fire departments from around the nation are working together.

I also would like to recognize the importance of the NFA's Executive Fire Officer (EFO) program. This four-year program is aimed at fostering transformative and proactive leaders of the fire service that are prepared to deal with tomorrow's challenges. Many fire departments around the nation now require graduation from the EFO program as a requirement for advancement to the position of chief of the department.

The USFA also provides important data through the National Fire Data Center and the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS). Good data is an imperative for good decision-making. The NFIRS represents the world's largest, national, annual database of fire incident information, and it includes 75 percent of all reported fires that occur annually. The NFIRS helps fire chiefs analyze and understand national trends in fire service data. For example, I used the recent USFA report on "Civilian Fire Injuries in Residential Buildings" to compare the national trends and data with those in Tucson. I also would like to recognize that the USFA recently launched a new

web-based interface for NFIRS that should make it easier for departments to add data to the system.

The USFA also provides the voice of America's fire service within the federal government. On issues such as human trafficking and the sharing of information about terrorist threats to local fire departments, the USFA has taken a leading role in ensuring that federal policies meet the needs of local fire departments. The USFA also works with federal agencies and national, state and local stakeholders like the IAFC and the WFCFA to improve communities' preparedness for wildland fire and improve training and operations during these incidents. In addition, the agency supports programs and creates training to help local communities develop fire prevention programs, especially among "at-risk" communities.

Today, America's fire and EMS leaders are concerned by the proposed cuts to the USFA. The USFA's budget has been cut by 25 percent already over the past decade. In FY 2010 and FY 2011, Congress funded the agency at \$45.588 million. For FY 2012, Congress appropriated \$44.038 million – a reduction of more than \$1.5 million. For FY 2013, the Administration proposes cutting the USFA to \$42.52 million and the House Appropriations Committee proposes cutting the USFA to \$42.46 million. The proposed House funding level would cut the USFA by almost 7 percent from FY 2010 level.

These cuts would cancel the final stages of the NFIRS modernization plan and eliminate the ability of local fire departments to get real-time information from the system. In addition, the cuts would force the USFA to reduce funding for its wildland fire programs, including its efforts to help communities in the wildland-urban interface. They also would eliminate courses at the NFA, discontinue programs to promote fire prevention for children, and end programs that support the use of fire sprinklers in residential homes.

Since 1978, we have seen the number of civilian deaths from fires drop from over 7,700 to 3,120 in 2010. This is a decrease of more than 50 percent. In addition, the direct property damage from fires has dropped from \$15 billion to \$11.6 billion in 2010 (in 2010 dollars).¹ The IAFC and the WFCFA are concerned that these cuts to the USFA's programs might slow the progress that we have made.

With the proposed cuts to USFA's budget, it is hard to recommend giving more responsibilities to the agency. However, I would like to express support for two initiatives that will expand USFA's role in disaster response.

The IAFC and the WFCFA support efforts to clarify that the USFA is the lead agency in Emergency Support Function (ESF) #4 for incidents that do not involve wildland fires. The ESF #4, "Firefighting Annex," manages the fire service response to all hazards, including wildland fires, hurricanes, tornadoes, and acts of terrorism. Specifically, it coordinates firefighting activities and provides personnel, supplies, and equipment to assist state, tribal, and local

¹ "The U.S. Fire Problem: Overview of fires by year," National Fire Protection Association, <http://www.nfpa.org/itemDetail.asp?categoryID=953&itemID=23033&URL=Research/Fire%20statistics/The%20U.S.%20fire%20problem>.

jurisdictions that are involved in firefighting operations as part of a federal response effort. The ESF #4 was developed prior to the events of September 11, 2001, and lists the U.S. Department of Agriculture's U.S. Forest Service (USFS) as the ESF Coordinator and Primary Agency. In 2006, the USFS and the USFA signed a Memorandum of Understanding in which the USFA would perform roles and responsibilities as a Support Agency for ESF #4.

The IAFC and the WFCFA recommend that the Secretary of Homeland Security make permanent the existing MOU between the USFS and the USFA. We also request that she direct the USFA to be the ESF Coordinator and Primary Agency for incidents that do not involve wildland fires. The local fire departments work well with the USFS in coordinating the ESF #4 function for wildland fires. However, we believe that the USFA will play a better role in coordinating non-wildland fire incidents. As a co-coordinator of ESF #4, the USFA could play a greater role in engaging America's fire and EMS departments in the response and recovery to future major national disasters.

In addition, the IAFC and the WFCFA support the establishment of teams of firefighters that can quickly deploy in the event of a major disaster or incident of national significance. These teams would aid local fire departments besieged by either a natural disaster or act of terrorism. They could perform tasks such as incident management, oversight of salvage and damage control efforts, community relations, and liaison to state, tribal and local emergency support services. As we witnessed in Arizona last year during the Wallow and Monument Fires, local fire departments need help in dealing with major incidents. The federal government and state and local agencies can provide mutual aid resources during an incident. However, after the incident is over, the local fire department has to handle the recovery operations with minimal assistance.

The current authorization for the USFA expires on September 30. The IAFC and the WFCFA recommend that Congress reauthorize this agency until FY 2017. Senators Joseph Lieberman (I-CT) and Susan Collins (R-ME) have introduced a bill in the Senate, S. 2218, to authorize \$76.49 million each year for the USFA through FY 2017. The IAFC endorsed this legislation, because it sets out a clear funding path for the USFA for the next five years. We urge the House to introduce and pass similar legislation this year.

On behalf of the leadership of America's fire and EMS departments, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. We have seen great progress in addressing the nation's fire problem since the creation of the USFA in the 1970s. The number of fires has been reduced and civilian and firefighter fatalities have both declined. The USFA has played a major role in this success. We urge Congress to continue its leadership in protecting both the American public and America's fire and EMS personnel by passing legislation to reauthorize this important agency.

I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

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Jim began his emergency service career in 1982 with an EMT class. He has worked in a few private agencies as an instructor, firefighter, EMT and security guard. He was hired by the Tucson Fire Department in 1988 and promoted through the ranks as a Paramedic, Captain, Training Captain, Operations Battalion Chief, Training Chief, Operations Deputy Chief, Assistant Chief of Training and Emergency Management and now as the Fire Chief.

Jim has been an active representative on the State Fire Training Association and the Arizona Fire Chiefs Association since 1992. Jim has a MBA from University of Arizona, a Bachelor's degree in Fire Service Management from Arizona State and an AAS in Fire Science from Pima Community College. He sits on advisory boards for Pima Community College in EMS and Fire Curriculum. In 2008 he was selected as Chief Fire Officer of the Year by the Arizona Fire Chiefs Association.

Jim is married and has three children. Jim has been on the Western Fire Chiefs Association (WFOA) board since 2002 as the Vice President representing the Arizona Fire Chiefs Association. At the Annual Membership Meeting held in Chicago, Illinois on August 26, 2010, Jim was elected to serve as the WFOA President.